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August 10, 1994

To the Conferees on Reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act:

We would like to thank the many legislators in both chambers and both parties who have contributed their efforts toward drafting a provision on partnerships between schools and cultural organizations to serve at-risk youth. Both the House version -- the Community Arts Partnership Act -- and the Senate version -- the Cultural Partnerships for At-Risk Children and Youth Act -- authorize partnerships that would concentrate on delivering curriculum and other services to those who are most in need.

In two important aspects, however, the House and Senate versions differ. In each aspect, the undersigned organizations prefer the original House language.

First, while the House version authorizes the Secretary of Education to run the partnerships program, the Senate version would create a new Committee on Cultural Partnerships, comprised of representatives from the Department of Education, NEA, NEH and IMS. We believe that the Committee structure would set up an unnecessary bureaucracy, dilute limited funds, and generally run counter to the principles of "reinventing government" that the rest of the revised ESEA so strongly affirms. Perhaps more important, we believe that Education is the appropriate agency to run this school program. While NEA, NEH and IMS do an excellent job of motivating cultural organizations to work with schools -- and they should continue to be supported in this important work -- we believe that the schools need to be motivated to initiate partnerships with cultural organizations. Only with enthusiastic leadership from the schools will communities learn to integrate all of their educational resources.

Second, the Senate version includes a trigger mechanism that connects funding for the partnerships to funding for the Federal cultural agencies: for instance, unless the NEA receives funding equal to current funding (through the Interior appropriations bill), the partnerships are not to receive funding (through the Labor-IHHS-Education appropriations bill). We believe that there is no sound reason to tie funding for the Department of Education to funding for other agencies. Support for cultural activities is currently found in myriad agencies; we believe that it would set a dangerous precedent to

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make funding for one agency's programs contingent on funding for a different agency. It would not be appropriate, for example, to tie funding for Department of Education science programs to funding for the National Science Foundation, or Department of Defense preservation programs to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

We suggest a requirement that the Secretary of Education consult actively with the Chairpersons of NEA and NEH and the Director of IMS.

Again, we salute the many members of Congress and their staff who have devoted long hours and much thought to this issue.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call any of the undersigned organizations.

American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta
American Association of Museums
American Association for State and Local History
American Council for the Arts
Association of Art Museum Directors
Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design
Association of Systematics Collections
Federation of State Humanities Councils
National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies
National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
National Humanities Alliance